

Dear Members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement:

Hello. My name is Aven Kelley. I am a senior Human Rights and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies double major at the University of Connecticut. I am also currently interning with Planned Parenthood Votes! Connecticut as part of their Generation Action intern program. I am writing to you to strongly urge you to support HB 6374: *An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses*.

I deeply understand how difficult it can be to ask for help, especially after a traumatic experience. I have never personally been sexually assaulted, but I have friends who have been. Being open about those experiences and seeking justice is an incredibly difficult and personal decision that I have seen people try to make. While some of them have been incredibly brave in speaking their truth, others have been understandably afraid of backlash and blame from people who are supposed to help them find justice. They have been uncertain if they will be disciplined for their actions at the time of their assault, despite the fact that they were the ones who were hurt and punishing them does no one any good. This would be in addition to the stigma and social repercussions that come with being open about experiences of sexual violence, and I cannot blame anyone for staying silent in such circumstances. Seeing people I care about want to seek help and justice but not know if it is safe to do so has been difficult.

That is why HB 6374 is so important. Its provisions assure students and employees that they will not be punished by their institutions for reaching out for help. Any step that can help make victim-survivors feel more comfortable speaking up and reaching out is significant in addressing the sexual violence epidemic and in improving people's lives. The stigma, shame, and trauma that too-often come with sexual assault are barriers enough to people reaching out for help. Fear of disciplinary consequences does not need to be another.

The provision in HB 6374 creating a two-year campus climate survey is also extremely important. Such a survey would give students, administrations, policymakers, and others far

more data about the status and trends of campus safety. The anonymity would give students who may not feel comfortable speaking openly a chance to share their experiences. Having the survey every two years also allows for more voices to be heard. Moving this forward would help with future measures to address the problems of sexual violence.

Protecting and supporting victim-survivors of sexual violence is essential. I urge the members of this Committee to vote in favor of this bill in order to further enshrine that protection and support. You have the opportunity to make asking for help just a little bit easier for people who may already find it extremely difficult. I hope that you do not let this opportunity pass you by.

Thank you for your time and your consideration,

Aven Kelley (they/them/theirs)

University of Connecticut